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Book Reviews

THE MODERN QUEST FOR GOD

The three books here noticed¹ are characteristic of the religious ferment of our day. Our inherited theology has based the confidence of Christians on the definite intervention into the world of supernatural factors which manifest the saving power of God. Now modern science tends to eliminate the extraordinary marvels on which Christian faith has relied. There is thus laid upon modern theologians the task of reinforcing faith against the influences which are weakening the old bulwarks. Such reinforcement may be undertaken in either of two ways: The historicity of miraculous interventions may be defended; or the attempt may be made to transfer confidence from the supernatural to the normal as the realm of God's revelation.

The little book on *Miracles* contains reprints of several articles originally published in *The Guardian*, in reply to Mr. J. M. Thompson's book entitled, *Miracles in the New Testament*.² Mr. Thompson, while asserting strongly his belief in the Incarnation, asserts that this belief does not require for its support the affirmation of the historicity of the New Testament miracles. Indeed, Mr. Thompson argued that historical criticism makes untenable the confident assertion that the miracles recorded in the New Testament writings are accounts of actual events. The seven contributions to this rejoinder all take issue with Mr. Thompson's thesis, and attempt to show that his denial of the historicity of the miracles of the New Testament is marked by a lack of critical accuracy. They insist that if we are actually guided by an objective

¹ *Miracles: Papers and Sermons Contributed to the "Guardian."* By W. Lock, W. Sanday, H. S. Holland, H. H. Williams, and H. S. Holland. With a prefatory note by H. S. Holland. London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911. Pp. vi+136. 2s. 6d. net.

Some Thoughts on God, and His Methods of Manifestation and Revelation. By J. Gurnhill. London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911. Pp. xii+224. 4s. net.

The Divinity of Christ. By Edward Scribner Ames. Chicago: The Bethany Press, 1911. Pp. 123. 75 cents.

² *Miracles in the New Testament.* By J. M. Thompson. London: Arnold Constable & Co.

survey of the evidence, the verdict must be in favor of the miracles, including that of the supernatural birth. Only two of the essays recognize the real point at issue, viz., the philosophical question as to what we mean by the supernatural, and what place it has in our actual religious faith. All the writers, however, actually make their final appeal to a fundamental belief in the supernatural. "If" (so they argue) "we really believe in the Incarnation, it is reasonable to expect that the incarnate deity would manifest his power in extraordinary ways." The book thus makes it evident that the affirmation or denial of miracles is not exclusively a matter of historical research. The data of the New Testament will inevitably be interpreted in accordance with already existing prejudice. Until the significance of the prejudice on one side or the other is examined, the debate is sure to be confused and inconclusive.

The second book, bearing the title, *Some Thoughts on God*, represents the type of mind which feels that the cause has been won if the old wine can be poured into new bottles which bear a "scientific" label. It is to be feared that a theological "pure food law" would detect serious discrepancies between the label and the content. Mr. Gurnhill outlines an inductive study, by which he proposes to see if the *universe*, interpreted in terms of evolutionary philosophy concepts, does or does not confirm the ideas provided by *revelation*. In thus distinguishing two distinct sources of knowledge, viz., universe and revelation concerning the world, the supernaturalistic presupposition is clear. Critical objections to certain doctrines are met by the inquiry, "Would it be reasonable to expect a divine revelation that did not involve mystery? Is not man a mystery to himself? If this be so, then *a fortiori* we ought not to be surprised to meet with mystery in things not human, but divine. *Credo quia incredibile*. The very mysteries of Christian Faith become the certificate of its veracity; and without mystery it would lose its claim to be divine." To open the door thus to any "mysteries" proclaimed by "revelation" will seem to those who have felt the searching demands of exactness prescribed by modern critical study like begging the whole question.

Dr. Ames approaches his problem from the point of view of one who has learned to use the empirical method with confidence. His little book contains six sermons on the general subject of the religious significance of Jesus. The second sermon, entitled "An Empirical View of Jesus," presents the main features of his faith. He feels that to attempt to define Jesus in terms of God would be like trying to ascertain the value of the known factors in an algebraic problem by defining them in terms

of the unknown x . We know what Jesus was, what ideals he inculcated, what kind of life he lived. To take him as the guide to a living faith in the God whom his faith reached is more profitable than to insist that we shall define him in terms of God. This position, Dr. Ames insists, does not lead to Unitarianism. In fact, he preserves a remarkably strong sense of the value of the Christ-mysticism which is characteristic of orthodoxy. But he insists that it is the *experience* of enrichment of personal life which is the real thing, not the assertion of the factual existence of an objective person, Christ, who personally causes the experience to be born in us. He therefore uses the language of Paulinism, while rejecting, or at least declining to use, the Pauline ontology. This very pragmatic position is open to considerable criticism. The recognition of the great religious value of this experience is indeed a welcome evidence of the genuinely empirical spirit which characterizes the author's thinking. As a matter of fact social inheritance preserves emotionally certain attitudes even when intellectually the basis for them is gone. But whether such a social-mystic experience as Dr. Ames outlines will continue to be possible for those who have actually ceased to affirm the orthodox Christology is a question which cannot be answered in advance in the affirmative. The book is an unusually stimulating invitation to try the experiment of a practical and empirical as opposed to an intellectual and apologetic approach to the attainment of religious satisfaction.

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